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Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations from the programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on evaluations submitted to the Committee (see A/37/38, para. 362). The present triennial review determined the extent to which the recommendations emanating from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) were implemented.

The OIOS evaluation recommendations addressed two aspects of the effectiveness of ESCAP in executing its mandate: its research and analysis work and its subregional work. At the conclusion of its fifty-fifth session, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 65 to 68 of the report of OIOS on the evaluation of ESCAP (E/AC.51/2015/7). The present triennial review determined that, of the four recommendations, three were implemented and one recommendation (recommendation 3) was partially implemented. There was some evidence of positive outcomes resulting from the implemented recommendations.

The triennial review was conducted through: (a) a review and analysis of biennial progress reports on the status of OIOS recommendations; (b) an analysis of relevant information, documents and reports; and (c) interviews with ESCAP staff.

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.
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Recommendation 1 addressed the need to implement previous recommendations made by the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee. A permanent editorial board was established as a platform for joint planning and implementation of biennial publications programmes in line with the secretariat's strategic direction for 2015–2020 and the role of ESCAP as a regional think tank. The Editorial Board was considered to be fulfilling its purpose. The implementation of other recommendations was still outstanding, but the Editorial Board was understood to be taking them forward.
Recommendation 2 addressed the need for more data on the utilization, effectiveness and impact of ESCAP research and analysis work. Important steps were taken to increase the availability of monitoring and evaluation data. The ESCAP institutional results framework outlined a results chain linking subprogramme outputs to secretariat-wide development results. Research and analysis were included in the framework results chain, and were assigned specific performance indicators. In addition, the number of subprogramme/thematic evaluations increased.
Recommendation 3 addressed the need for wider dissemination of ESCAP research and analysis work. ESCAP published communications guidelines to ensure consistency and coherence across the organization and the maintenance of a common visual identity. It revamped its website and consolidated various newsletters. Despite those improvements, however, the recommendation was only partially implemented, as ESCAP did not yet have a final outreach strategy, nor had it established a single database of all stakeholders.
ESCAP research and analysis work did experience some positive changes, including improved quality and timeliness of ESCAP publications; better linkages between ESCAP research and analysis and its normative and technical cooperation work; improved credibility of ESCAP as a research organization; wider dissemination of ESCAP publications through the Internet and social media; and increased availability of monitoring and evaluation data on ESCAP research and analysis work.
Recommendation 4 addressed the need to improve collaboration between ESCAP substantive divisions and its subregional offices. In November 2014, a guidance note on relations between ESCAP substantive divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions was issued. Coordination mechanisms played an important role in reducing uncertainties and ensuring adherence to and internalizing the provisions of the guidance note. There was no substantial increase in resources for ESCAP subregional work, but that no longer seemed to be an issue. The budget for the 2018–2019 biennium saw an increase in professional posts for South-East Asia and North and Central Asia. As a result of those combined efforts, ESCAP subregional work was perceived to have been strengthened.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-fifth session, in 2015, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (E/AC.51/2015/7). Delegations expressed appreciation for the report. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations, while recognizing that certain progress had already been made.

2. The present report is issued pursuant to a triennial review of the recommendations, and examines the current status of the implementation of the four recommendations contained in the evaluation report. The review also discusses whether the implementation of the recommendations contributed to changes, and, if so, to what extent.

3. The methodology for the triennial review included:

(a) Review and analysis of biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS recommendations database;

(b) Analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from ESCAP on various topics related to the recommendations;

(c) Remote interviews with a non-random sample of ESCAP staff.

4. The present report incorporates comments received from ESCAP during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with ESCAP, on which comments were received (see annex). OIOS expresses its appreciation for the cooperation extended by ESCAP in the drafting of the present report.

II. Results

5. ESCAP was established in 1947 as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council and the regional arm of the United Nations in the Asia-Pacific region. It serves 53 member States and 9 associate members. The ESCAP mandate is to promote regional cooperation and action for inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific. It provides a forum for its member States on regional cooperation and assists them in building and sustaining shared economic growth and social equity. The ESCAP secretariat undertakes numerous research and analysis activities in the context of its substantive areas of focus and many ESCAP research and analysis activities culminate in publications. The ESCAP secretariat, which supports the Commission, is located in Bangkok and is headed by the Executive Secretary, and the delivery of ESCAP programmes is supported by the subregional offices and regional institutions. The Pacific subregional office was opened in 1984, the East and North-East Asia office began operating in 2010 and the North and Central Asia and the South and South-West Asia offices began operating in 2011. Subregional activities for South-East Asia are managed by ESCAP headquarters.

6. OIOS made four recommendations for ESCAP related to: (a) implementing a research and publications agenda; (b) improving the monitoring and evaluation of its research and analysis work; (c) developing and implementing an outreach strategy; and (d) implementing a framework on the working relations between ESCAP subregional offices and divisions. Three recommendations were implemented, while one recommendation was partially implemented (recommendation 3). There was

some evidence of positive outcomes resulting from the implemented recommendations. The implementation status of each of the four recommendations is discussed below.

Recommendation 1
Implementation of a research and publications agenda

7. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

> The Executive Secretary should establish an action plan to implement recommendations from the Research and Publications Committee with concrete timelines and clear roles and responsibilities, giving emphasis to establishing a multi-year research agenda and a permanent research and publications committee. The research agenda should take into account joint planning, development and dissemination of research and analysis work between all divisions and subregional offices and linkages between the research and analysis work of ESCAP and its normative and technical cooperation work.

8. The recommendation was made on the basis of the evaluation result that ESCAP should institutionalize and implement recommendations made by the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee in 2013.

9. The report of the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee to the Executive Secretary of ESCAP of May 2013 contained 7 key recommendations and 35 associated suggestions for improving the quality, outreach and impact of ESCAP publications, which included: (a) establishing a permanent ESCAP Research and Publications Committee to coordinate the research agenda and oversee the publications programme; (b) rationalizing existing resources and functions to enhance the effectiveness of the ESCAP publications programme; (c) strengthening the ESCAP publications strategy; (d) enhancing ESCAP research capabilities; (e) creating a branding strategy for and disseminating ESCAP publications and documents; and (f) representing ESCAP on the United Nations Publications Board. The report was presented to ESCAP senior management on 11 June 2013. At the meeting, it was decided that the Chief of Staff would identify which of the recommendations could be instituted immediately and which would need further discussion and consideration by the Senior Management Team for later implementation.

10. While no official action plan was developed to implement the Research and Publication Committee's recommendations, their implementation was set in motion through the activities of a permanent ESCAP editorial board. In 2015, a permanent Research and Publications Committee was established to serve as a platform for planning, developing and disseminating research and publications from across ESCAP. The Committee was later renamed the ESCAP Editorial Board. The terms of reference of the Board, dated June 2016, required it to establish a strategic approach and set guidelines for the ESCAP publications programme, in line with the organization's programme of work focused on inclusive and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific. Although they did not state it in writing, during interviews for the triennial review staff reported that the Board was responsible for implementing the recommendations of the ESCAP Research and Publications Committee. The Editorial Board was chaired by the Executive Secretary, and the Chief of the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section served as Secretary. Its terms of reference determined that it should hold at least four formal meetings a year, with a membership comprising division heads and representatives from subregional offices and regional

institutes. From February 2016 to March 2017, the Editorial Board met in person five times. After that, due to scheduling conflicts, matters were discussed by email.

11. Staff interviewed also agreed that the Editorial Board had introduced a streamlined and more consistent and rigorous review process for research and publications. Main benefits of the new process were joint planning (including the joint review of proposed publication titles), stronger oversight during inception phases and cross-fertilization between divisions. Staff noted that the Board had worked well, in that publications focused on more than one topic and included cross-cutting issues. Furthermore, they stated that the quality of ESCAP publications had improved, as had the credibility of ESCAP as a research organization.

12. In 2013, the Research and Publications Committee had recommended that all ESCAP publications should be guided, as appropriate, by a multi-year research agenda in support of the institution's vision and key mandates. An ESCAP multi-year corporate research agenda was found to exist in the standard form of biennial publications programmes. Contrary to earlier bienniums, an overarching framework was developed in the form of the Executive Secretary's guidance note on the secretariat's strategic direction for 2015–2020. The framework set the substantive agenda for the entirety of the Commission's work, including its research and publications.

13. For the 2016–2017 and 2018–2019 bienniums, ESCAP issued instructions to its substantive divisions and subregional offices that required them to assess publications for their continued relevance and to remove obsolete titles. In addition, proposed publications were required to be founded in intergovernmental mandates (see ST/SGB/2012/2).

14. ESCAP publications were published in a timely manner. Thirty-one publications were included in the standard publications programme for the biennium 2016–2017. All publications went through the revised review process and were published. In addition, four publications were added to the programme and released at the request of member States. The United Nations Publications Board approved 27 publications for the publications programme for the biennium 2018–2019.

15. To ensure greater linkages between its research and analysis work and its normative and technical cooperation work, ESCAP included its research and analysis work as part of the preparations for the work programmes of its subprogrammes. To link ESCAP publications with its intergovernmental work, and to promote the usage of its publications, ESCAP presented and discussed flagship publications at ESCAP intergovernmental meetings in 2017. The *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2017* was launched at the fifth session of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction; the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2017* was launched at a meeting of the Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Financing for Development; and the *Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2017* was discussed at a meeting of the Committee on Trade and Investment. Further interlinkages and synergies were expected with the implementation of Umoja Extension 2, covering online strategic planning and performance management.

16. Biennial publications programmes were also reviewed by the Editorial Board, resulting in the improved quality of ESCAP publications and the well-coordinated planning and review of research and publication work with inputs from divisions and subregional offices. That fulfilled the purpose of the recommended secretariat-wide multi-year research agenda to support ESCAP in its role as a regional policy think tank.

17. The recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 2
Improvement in monitoring and evaluation of research and analysis work

18. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

> ESCAP should improve monitoring and evaluation of its research and analysis work, including publications, by establishing ESCAP-wide performance measures of such work and systematically measuring their cost-effectiveness, utilization and impact. Moreover, future self-evaluations should extend beyond single projects to include more subprogrammatic and thematic issues.

19. The recommendation was made on the basis of the evaluation result that ESCAP monitoring and evaluation data for its research and analysis function were lacking, which resulted in an inability to assess programme effectiveness. The main monitoring data source for ESCAP was the Secretariat-wide Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS). However, ESCAP had not reported all research and analysis outputs or publications in the system (see E/AC.51/2015/7, para. 9). In addition, most of its evaluations were project-based and did not cut across subprogrammes or focus on thematic issues (see E/AC.51/2015/7, para. 34).

20. Research and analysis is an integral part of the ESCAP institutional results framework results chain. It constitutes one of the core sets of activities: generate innovative research and analysis to support member States in policymaking. At the outcome level, ESCAP specifically expected that member States and other stakeholders would utilize ESCAP knowledge products to develop and improve policies and programmes for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Five institutional indicators served to track that outcome:

- Indicator 1. Percentage of ESCAP stakeholders surveyed assessing that ESCAP is providing relevant, strategic and timely knowledge products on sustainable development. Source: ESCAP-wide stakeholder surveys (midpoint and terminal)
- Indicator 2. Percentage of ESCAP stakeholders surveyed indicating that ESCAP knowledge products are used to develop and improve policies and programmes for achieving sustainable development. Source: ESCAP-wide stakeholder surveys (midpoint and terminal)
- Indicator 3. Number of citations/references to ESCAP knowledge products in national policy documents, media outputs, policy-related literatures. Source: to be established
- Indicator 4. Number of downloads of web-distributed ESCAP flagship publications and other selected knowledge products. Source: web analytics and social media statistics from the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section (annual basis)
- Indicator 5. Number of ESCAP website visits, number of tweets and potential reach, number of "Likes" in Facebook and potential reach. Source: web analytics and social media statistics from the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section (annual basis)

21. The institutional results framework required that annual reports demonstrate progress towards achieving ESCAP results at the outcome level. In 2016, the Strategy and Programme Management Division compiled information on performance

indicators for ESCAP sessions. A draft presentation was available for 2017 that was limited to ESCAP intergovernmental and capacity development work indicators.

22. The ESCAP capacity development strategy for 2016–2019, issued in January 2017, indicated that monitoring and evaluation constituted a primary pillar of results-based management. In addition, the Executive Secretary issued updated ESCAP monitoring and evaluation policies and guidelines on subprogramme and project monitoring and evaluations.

23. The number of subprogramme/thematic evaluations increased from one per year during 2012–2015 to two per year during 2016–2017. Four subprogramme/thematic evaluations were planned for 2018 and 2019 respectively, budget allowing. The table below provides more details on ESCAP evaluations.

ESCAP subprogramme/thematic evaluations, 2012–2017

Year	*Subprogramme thematic evaluation*	*Number*
2012	Evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction	1
2013	Review of the conference structure of ESCAP (E/ESCAP/69/18)	1
2014	Evaluation of non-reimbursable loan services at ESCAP	1
2015	Evaluation of the establishment of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management	1
2016	Evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on macroeconomic policy and inclusive development	2
	Evaluation of the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase II (2012–2016)	
2017	Evaluation of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia	2
	Evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on social development	
2018	Evaluation of the Environment and Development Division	4
	Evaluation of the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division	
	Evaluation of the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture	
	Evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology	
2019	Evaluation of the subregional offices, including cooperation and coordination with ESCAP substantive divisions and regional institutions	4
	Evaluation of the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division	
	Evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management	
	Evaluation of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization	

Source: Evaluation plan, Strategy and Programme Management Division

24. The extent to which subprogramme and thematic evaluations assessed ESCAP research and analysis work depended on the defined scope of each individual evaluation. For example, a specific objective of the evaluation of the ESCAP subprogramme on macroeconomic policy and inclusive development was to assess the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the work of the subprogramme, with a particular focus on its research and analysis work and on its work in relation to countries with special needs.

25. Staff interviewed agreed that the availability of monitoring and evaluation data for ESCAP research and analysis work improved as a result of the institutional results

framework and from the increased number of strategic and subprogramme evaluations.

26. The recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 3
Development and implementation of an outreach strategy

27. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

> ESCAP should develop and implement an ESCAP-wide outreach strategy for its research and analysis work that incorporates developing a database of all stakeholders, common branding elements for all publications and web pages, and dissemination for each type of work.

28. The recommendation was made on the basis of the evaluation result regarding the need for wider dissemination of ESCAP research and analysis work. ESCAP maintained some records on its audience but lacked consistent tracking of the dissemination of its research and analytical outputs.

29. In 2015, ESCAP started to produce communications plans for individual research and analysis outputs and intergovernmental events and, in 2016, it revamped its website to provide an up-to-date outreach platform and launched a corporate newsletter, which replaced individual subprogramme newsletters. ESCAP consciously shifted away from publishing hard copies of its publications to sharing publications and other communications using the Internet and social media platforms, although printed publications continued to be distributed to key stakeholders.

30. Work was also undertaken to establish common ESCAP branding elements. In 2017, the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section published communications guidelines for 2017. The guidelines, which included a publications style guide, were intended to keep ESCAP internal and external communications consistent and coherent across the Commission. An internal memo from the Executive Secretary, dated 16 October 2017, stressed the need to maintain a visual identity across ESCAP publications in order to raise the Commission's profile.

31. During the triennial review, the ESCAP secretariat updated the communications and advocacy strategy created for the 2011–2012 biennium. A draft ESCAP communications and outreach strategy was available, and was scheduled for discussion as part of an internal consultation process on how to strengthen ESCAP research work. At the time of writing, the release of the final version of the strategy was expected within three months.

32. At the time of the triennial review, a single database containing the names and addresses of all stakeholders for the dissemination of ESCAP publications had not been created. According to staff interviewed, ESCAP did not have sufficient resources to develop and maintain a single comprehensive database and so continued to maintain three different stakeholder lists that served different but related functions. The Office of the Executive Secretary maintained a common list of member States and associate members, international and United Nations organizations, non-governmental organizations and relevant non-ESCAP members; the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section maintained a media mailing list; and substantive divisions maintained a division-level list of research and academic institutions and subject-matter experts. Staff also indicated that the three stakeholder lists fulfilled the purpose of disseminating ESCAP research and analytical outputs.

33. As a result of the institutional results framework, ESCAP monitored access to its research and analysis work. Web analytics were used to track the number of page views of and downloads from the ESCAP website. Online access to ESCAP publications increased from 2016 to 2017 by 31 per cent in terms of downloads and by 1,214 per cent in terms of page views. During that period, the increase in percentage of downloads was greatest for the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2016: Year-end Update* (241 per cent), and that publication also experienced the most downloads in absolute terms (1,278). In 2017, ESCAP also tracked Twitter coverage of its publications. ESCAP is not yet able to track citations to ESCAP publications, and thus the extent to which research and analysis outputs are being used. ESCAP staff indicated that the development of a centralized digital depository for that purpose would be complicated and expensive.

34. The recommendation was partially implemented. In order to be fully implemented, ESCAP needs to finalize its communications and outreach strategy. That should include the consolidation of the current three mailing lists into a single stakeholder database.

Recommendation 4
Implementation of the framework on the working relations between ESCAP subregional offices and divisions

35. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

> The Executive Secretary should implement and enforce the November 2012 framework (after updating it, as applicable) on the working relations between subregional offices and divisions, which clarifies their respective roles, responsibilities and authority. As part of the framework's implementation, ESCAP should discuss the question of resource allocation as it relates to its expected accomplishments.

36. The recommendation was made on the basis of the evaluation result regarding the lack of implementation and enforcement of the ESCAP November 2012 framework on the roles and responsibilities of subregional offices and divisions. Divisions and subregional offices lacked a shared understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities and faced limited resources and structural questions related to the engagement of subregional offices in substantive work.

37. On 26 November 2014, the Executive Secretary issued an updated guidance note on relations between ESCAP substantive divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions. The guidance note was developed with inputs from senior management and superseded the November 2012 framework on the working relations between ESCAP subregional offices and divisions.

38. During interviews, staff from ESCAP noted that, over time, divisions and subregional offices had arrived at a common understanding of their respective roles, responsibilities and added value; they stated that information exchanges, mutual engagement and collaboration worked well. They also stated that the advantages of subregional offices were their proximity and accessibility to member States, their knowledge of local contexts and their integrative nature, bringing together vertical divisions and subprogrammes. At the same time, staff suggested that good collaboration could not be attributed solely to formal guidance, and that mindsets, structures and systems, such as iSeek, which is an internal communications and knowledge-sharing tool for Secretariat staff serving at all duty stations and field missions, and the holding of "weekly briefs", also influenced collaboration.

39. The Strategy and Programme Management Division was charged with facilitating and supporting regular joint planning and review processes in line with the provisions of the guidance note, including (a) annual joint planning and review meetings of all divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions; and (b) regular bilateral consultation meetings as required between divisions, subregional offices and/or regional institutions for joint planning, review and implementation purposes. Three platforms in particular served the purpose of ensuring adequate coordination as specified in the provisions of the guidance note: weekly meetings of the Senior Management Team, "weekly briefs" and semi-annual consultation meetings organized by the Strategy and Programme Management Division.

40. The guidance note required that implementation be reviewed periodically by the ESCAP Senior Management Team and that adherence to the provisions contained in the note were to be included in the performance goals, targets and appraisal of all members of the Senior Management Team. The Strategy and Programme Management Division was also delegated responsibility for monitoring compliance and bringing issues to the attention of the Executive Secretary. There was, however, no evidence that the provisions of the guidance note were included in the employee performance appraisal systems.

41. The ESCAP evaluation plan for 2017–2019 scheduled an evaluation of the subregional offices, including cooperation and coordination with ESCAP substantive divisions and regional institutions in 2019, budget allowing.

42. While the guidance note did not address resources or structural questions, staff interviewed did not suggest particular challenges related to funding. Regular resource requirements for subprogramme 8, Subregional activities for development, ranged from $7.4 million for the biennium 2012–2013 to $8.1 million for 2014–2015, and from $7.9 million for 2016–2017 to $8.3 million (proposed) for 2018–2019. The number of budgeted posts (regular resources) for the subregions also ranged from 23 in 2012–2013 to 25 in 2014–2015, and from 24 posts in 2016–2017 to 25 (proposed) in 2018–2019. A P-5 professional post, based at ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok, was proposed for the South-East Asia region in 2018–2019. Three division-level professional posts were proposed for relocation to the North and Central Asia subregional office, but would continue working for their respective divisions.

43. A revised guidance note exists and working relations and resource allocations between substantive divisions and ESCAP subregional offices appear satisfactory. However, ESCAP can continue to strengthen the working relations between its subregional offices and divisions by implementing its review mechanisms for the guidance note.

44. The recommendation has been implemented.

III. Conclusion

45. ESCAP took important steps to implement the four recommendations contained in the OIOS evaluation relevant to its research and analysis work on the one hand and its subregional work on the other. Some positive changes were seen as a result. The ESCAP research and publications agenda was strengthened, befitting the Commission's role as a regional think tank within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Opportunities for promoting publications with national policymakers were sought and publications reached more potential users. In addition, ESCAP enhanced its monitoring and reporting efforts to capture the extent to which

research and analysis outputs were produced and contributed to overarching institutional goals. Furthermore, collaboration between ESCAP substantive divisions and its subregional offices appeared to have improved owing to the use of the guidance note on relations between ESCAP substantive divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions. The planned self-evaluation of the subregional offices should provide important further insights.

46. Not all recommendations by the Research and Publications Committee were addressed by the Editorial Board, however, possibly resulting in some missed opportunities, such as strengthening human resources capacities to administer and manage the ESCAP publications programme or building ESCAP research capacities. In addition, ESCAP should finalize the communications and outreach strategy, and establish a single stakeholder database.

(*Signed*) Heidi **Mendoza**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2018

Annex*

Comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

The management of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) expresses its appreciation to the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for undertaking a comprehensive, consultative and evidenced-based process in reviewing the implementation of recommendations emanating from the OIOS programme evaluation of ESCAP. Since 2014, ESCAP has introduced new guidelines and measures to strengthen the prioritization and effectiveness of all aspects of its programme of work. Its key strategy focused on serving the Commission's core role as a regional think tank; providing the pre-eminent regional intergovernmental platform for building policy consensus and regional cooperation on inclusive and sustainable development; and serving as a regional development knowledge hub. The findings of the present OIOS triennial review contain valuable evidence of the considerable progress made by ESCAP towards its goal.

It was gratifying to note that the OIOS review confirmed positive changes in ESCAP research and analysis work, including improved quality and timeliness of ESCAP publications; better linkages between ESCAP research and analysis and its normative and technical cooperation work; improved credibility of ESCAP as a research organization; wider dissemination of ESCAP publications through the Internet and social media; and increased availability of monitoring and evaluation data on ESCAP research and analysis work.

With respect to the implementation of the recommendations, it was noted that of the four recommendations, three were implemented and one recommendation (recommendation 3) was partially implemented. In order to be fully implemented, OIOS advised that ESCAP needs to finalize its communications and outreach strategy and consolidate its current three mailing lists into a single stakeholder database. ESCAP management is committed to implementing the remaining actions and fully addressing the OIOS recommendation in line with its efforts to further strengthen the dissemination and impact of its research, analytical and publications work.

In that context, ESCAP management has initiated a process of significant deliberation and reflection on the current United Nations development system reform proposals initiated by the Secretary-General, suggesting, among other things, the strengthening of the role of the regional commissions as think tanks. As part of that process, a senior management workshop was held in January 2018 to discuss the various elements of the United Nations development system reform proposals and agree on how to further strengthen ESCAP. Regardless of the final decision on the reform of the United Nations development system, it was decided that ESCAP would further improve the quality and impact of its research and analysis in conjunction with its intergovernmental and technical cooperation work and introduce initiatives and changes that could strengthen the formulation and dissemination of its analytical work. Those changes will be reflected in an update of the ESCAP communications and outreach strategy that will address the recommendation of OIOS.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services presents the full text of comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

With respect to the development of the single stakeholder database, ESCAP currently maintains three different stakeholder lists that serve different but related functions. The Office of the Executive Secretary maintains a common list of member States and associate members, international and United Nations organizations, non-governmental organizations and relevant non-ESCAP members; the Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section maintains a media mailing list; and substantive divisions maintain a division-level list of research and academic institutions and subject-matter experts. Those lists of stakeholders have fulfilled the purpose of disseminating ESCAP research and analytical outputs. ESCAP will further explore the possibility of consolidating those stakeholder lists into a single database as part of the implementation of Umoja Extension 2 at ESCAP.

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Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations from the programme evaluation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on evaluations submitted to the Committee (see A/37/38, para. 362). In the present triennial review, a determination has been made as to the extent to which the seven recommendations emanating from the programme evaluation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) have been implemented. In addition, the extent to which that implementation has contributed to programme changes has been assessed.

The evaluation conducted by OIOS in 2015 focused on the research and analysis pillar of UNCTAD. In its recommendations, OIOS addressed the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of UNCTAD in fulfilling its mandate. At the conclusion of its fifty-fifth session, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the evaluation report of OIOS. In the present triennial review, it has been determined that five recommendations (recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7) were implemented and two (recommendations 3 and 6) were partially implemented. There are also early indications of positive outcomes resulting from the implemented recommendations.

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.
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In recommendation 1, UNCTAD was advised to strengthen its institutional orientation to results-based management. UNCTAD implemented the recommendation by streamlining results-based management functions, initially through the Results-based Management Coordination Group and subsequently through the Programme Committee and its working group. UNCTAD also focused on strengthening results-based management processes through improved planning, implementation and evaluation of its research and analysis products. New tools included a logical framework. In addition, the Communications, Information and Outreach Monthly Monitor reports, in which the usage of UNCTAD research and analysis products are tracked, were used for strategic decision-making. UNCTAD also developed in-house results-based management training activities.

In recommendation 2, OIOS focused on the need for UNCTAD to more clearly delineate a typology of its research and analysis products. UNCTAD addressed the recommendation by revising its typology, which it then used to classify the products of its 2018–2019 publications programme. The revised typology led to clearer prioritization of report processing, as well as a reclassification of documents, resulting in more documents being released electronically.

In recommendation 3, UNCTAD was called upon to develop quality assurance frameworks for its research and analysis and statistics products and to implement the frameworks in all divisions. UNCTAD implemented the recommendation by revising its 2014 policy clearance process for such products, whereby it established institutional criteria for policy clearance and guiding rules for the clearance of documents and publications. That action resulted in improved clearance procedures, as well as stronger coordination and interdivisional cross-fertilization among divisions. The United Nations Statistics Quality Assurance Framework had not yet been finalized. However, once completed, it was reportedly to be adopted by UNCTAD for implementation in all divisions.

In recommendation 4, UNCTAD was advised to strengthen its Publications Committee to ensure a more strategic, institution-wide approach to work planning relating to its research and analysis pillar. UNCTAD implemented the recommendation by revising the terms of reference of the Publications Committee which, although not yet finalized, were being used by the Committee to govern its operations. In addition, UNCTAD introduced the UNCTAD Research Seminar Series to promote discussion among researchers and the "Crossing the Line Initiative: Research in Motion" to encourage joint divisional work through the exchange of ideas and data as well as bilateral discussions between UNCTAD divisions to strategically streamline research and analysis workplans and products. Those measures resulted in greater coherence and interdivisional collaboration at meetings. The data gathered in the Communications, Information and Outreach Monthly Monitor report were being used to streamline the process for publications by 2020–2021, including the determination of which publications to continue and which to eliminate.

In recommendation 5, OIOS focused on the need for UNCTAD to strengthen the dissemination of its research and analysis products. UNCTAD developed a communications, information and outreach dissemination strategy that focused on virtual dissemination of such products. In addition, it developed minimum requirements for dissemination outlining the mandatory and recommended practices for dissemination for each of the six types of publications issued by UNCTAD. That action resulted in an increase in web-only publications, enhanced strategic positioning of the Communications, Information and Outreach Section in relation to other

divisions and the ability to track the number of downloaded reports and visitors to the UNCTAD website.

In recommendation 6, OIOS underscored the need for UNCTAD to increase gender mainstreaming in its research and analysis products. UNCTAD made four pledges on gender equality within the framework of the International Gender Champions Initiative, one of which was to mainstream gender in all UNCTAD flagship reports. A sample of 15 UNCTAD flagship reports from 2015–2017 indicated that 9 of the reports referenced gender and 6 of them had very little to no mention of gender. UNCTAD appointed gender focal points to ensure the inclusion of gender considerations during the production of flagship reports.

In recommendation 7, UNCTAD was called upon to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of its research and analysis results. UNCTAD developed a number of tools for the monitoring and evaluation framework, including minimum standards for monitoring and evaluation, a monitoring and evaluation framework for research and a risk-based evaluation plan. The monitoring and evaluation framework allowed UNCTAD to strengthen results-based management of the research and analysis pillar, ensuring its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact, and to focus evaluations on UNCTAD priorities and on the research and analysis pillar. UNCTAD also developed research and analysis-related indicators, while also harmonizing the broader suite of UNCTAD indicators.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-fifth session, in 2015, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the programme evaluation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (E/AC.51/2015/4). The evaluation focused on the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the research and analysis pillar of UNCTAD.

2. The Committee expressed appreciation for the important work carried out by UNCTAD and for the positive overall assessment of the research and analysis pillar and reiterated that the main objective of UNCTAD was to assist developing countries, especially the least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition in integrating beneficially into the global economy in support of inclusive and sustainable growth and development. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 51 to 57 of the OIOS report on the evaluation of UNCTAD.

3. The present report is issued pursuant to a triennial review in which the implementation status of the seven recommendations contained in the OIOS evaluation was examined. Wherever possible, the extent to which the implemented recommendations had contributed to programme changes was also assessed.

4. The methodology for the triennial review included:

(a) A review and analysis of biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the database of the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division;

(b) An analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from UNCTAD on topics relating to the recommendations;

(c) Interviews conducted with a purposive sample of seven senior managers and programme staff within UNCTAD.

5. The report incorporates comments by UNCTAD received during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with UNCTAD for its final comments, which are provided in the annex to the present report. OIOS expresses its appreciation for the cooperation and assistance provided by UNCTAD in the preparation of the report.

II. Results

6. UNCTAD was established by the General Assembly in 1964 (see resolution 1995 (XIX)). UNCTAD is the focal point in the United Nations system for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development. The work of UNCTAD revolves around three pillars: (a) consensus-building; (b) research and analysis; and (c) technical cooperation. In its evaluation report, OIOS focused on the contribution of the research and analysis pillar to the overall programme performance of UNCTAD.

7. In the evaluation report, UNCTAD was issued seven recommendations, namely, that it: (a) strengthen its institutional orientation to results-based management; (b) improve the typology of its research and analysis products; (c) develop quality assurance frameworks, both for its research and analysis and its statistics products,

and implement them in all divisions; (d) strengthen the Publications Committee for a more strategic, institutional-wide approach to work planning relating to its research and analysis pillar; (e) strengthen the dissemination of research and analysis products; (f) increase gender mainstreaming in research and analysis products; and (g) strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the results of its research and analysis products. Five recommendations (recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7) were implemented and two (recommendations 3 and 6) were partially implemented. Where recommendations were implemented, there is some evidence that the implementation contributed to positive outcomes. The implementation status of each of the seven recommendations is discussed below.

Recommendation 1
Strengthen results-based management within UNCTAD

8. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

> The Secretary-General of UNCTAD should accelerate the strengthening of the Conference's institutional orientation towards results by finalizing structural arrangements for membership of the results-based management coordinating group, providing dedicated capacity and clarifying its draft terms of reference, including the group's overarching objectives and purpose, individual roles and responsibilities, attendance expectations and recommendation and decision-making guidelines.
>
> Indicator of achievement: Production of new or revised documents, followed by their meaningful implementation (for example, regular meetings, well-attended by all divisions, resulting in decisions and actions on key areas of strategic importance).

9. The recommendation addressed the need for UNCTAD to improve its quality assurance mechanisms and to measure the use and effects of its research and analysis products. UNCTAD had put in place components for improving its approach to results-based management but key gaps remained, for example, in the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the quality, use and ultimate effectiveness of its research and analysis products. In addition, UNCTAD did not have a dissemination strategy for its products or dedicated human or financial resources allocated to dissemination, as a result of which publications were not reaching their intended audiences or picked up by the media.

10. In November 2015, the Deputy Secretary-General issued an internal memorandum on the revised terms of reference for the Results-based Management Coordination Group. The revised terms defined the purpose of the Group as being: (a) to provide dedicated attention to the implementation of results-based management within UNCTAD; and (b) to promote the mainstreaming of results-based management in daily managerial decision-making. The Group met twice in 2015 and once in 2016.[1] At the meetings, the Group proposed to address the following:

(a) Improvements to the existing indicators in the framework of the proposed 2018–2019 programme budget;

(b) Reviews of subprogramme logical frameworks;

[1] Minutes of the meetings of the Results-based Management Coordination Group held on 25 March and 23 June 2015; no minutes were available for the meeting held on 7 January 2016.

(c) The definition of guidelines and minimum standards to ensure that maximum results are achieved through UNCTAD publications.

11. In order to improve efficiency, in early 2016, UNCTAD further streamlined the functions of the Results-based Management Coordination Group into existing structures, whereby the existing interdivisional Project Review Committee (for the technical cooperation pillar) and the Publications Committee (for the research and analysis pillar) replaced the Results-based Management Coordination Group.

12. UNCTAD also established a working group as the main body for supporting and implementing the work of the Publications Committee. The group's primary focus was to improve the planning, implementation and evaluation of research and analysis products. It developed a logical framework to guide directors on what was to be monitored and how the resulting information would be used for learning and for engaging in discussion with member States and other targeted stakeholders. The group also identified 10 minimum results-based management requirements for the research and analysis pillar, including problem and stakeholder analysis, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation. While no formal minutes of the working group meetings were available, correspondence among participants indicated that each division was represented at the meetings.

13. In addition, in order to better monitor and analyse results, UNCTAD used the aforementioned logical framework indicators to inform the eight Communications, Information and Outreach Monthly Monitor reports produced from 2015 to 2017. The reports contained compiled data on public reaction to and reception of UNCTAD reports, including the number of mentions of UNCTAD in the media, the most downloaded reports, the number of unique visitors to the website, the number of Twitter impressions and the most successful tweets and Facebook posts.

14. In interviews, staff reported that the Communications, Information and Outreach Monthly Monitor reports were widely read throughout UNCTAD, that they provided staff and directors with a clearer understanding of the reach and readership of UNCTAD research and analysis products and that they influenced director-level decisions in the following ways:

(a) The 2002 report entitled "How to Prepare Your Business Plan", which was the second most downloaded UNCTAD report in September 2017, was reworked and updated; and one of the main chapters of the UNCTAD policy brief "Robots and Industrialization in Developing Countries", one of the top five most frequently downloaded UNCTAD reports between September 2016 and September 2017, was based on information from the Monthly Monitor reports;

(b) Capitalizing on the attention received by the chapter on automation in the *Trade and Development Report 2017: Beyond austerity: Towards a global new deal*, it was decided that the following report would build on some of the rich material produced and draw on the policy implications for further research;[2]

(c) Daily press clippings of UNCTAD mentions in the news were circulated;

15. The working group also used the Communications, Information and Outreach Monthly Monitor reports to develop other possible indicators, such as a comparison of the uptake of flagship reports one year after their launch (for example, media mentions and downloads) and to guide dissemination efforts (for example, the number of press statements, launch events, outreach videos, presentations and seminars).

[2] Minutes of the meeting of the Publications Committee held on 27 October 2017.

16. In order to further strengthen its focus on results, UNCTAD launched an updated readership survey in May 2016. The updated survey examined quality and usage issues more explicitly, for example, by gauging respondents' familiarity with reports and their views on the topical relevance of publications and on the quality of analysis and clarity of messages and policy recommendations and determining for what purpose each report was being used. The survey was disseminated on the UNCTAD website and through social media. However, the number of responses (130) was low, thus limiting meaningful interpretation. UNCTAD planned to launch a similar survey for the 2017 flagship reports using a more robust survey dissemination strategy through its divisional contacts.

17. In October 2016, UNCTAD, in collaboration with the United Nations System Staff College and the Return on Investment Institute, organized a results-based management training activity. A total of 24 programme managers and 15 senior managers attended. In addition, UNCTAD developed an in-house results-based management training activity based on its minimum results-based management requirements and guidelines, which used relevant examples from within UNCTAD itself. A total of 13 staff members participated in the first internal training session, in November 2017. The activity, the theme of which was "Competition and consumer protection", was developed in collaboration with the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit and the Technical Cooperation Division. Five additional training sessions/workshops were being planned for the first half of 2018.

18. In interviews, staff indicated that results-based management remained a challenge, given that it could not easily be applied to the research and analysis pillar and was too far removed from the UNCTAD goal of influencing ideas. They further noted, however, that with the United Nations emphasis on managing for results, the upcoming launch in 2020–2021 of Umoja Extension 2 (United Nations enterprise resource planning system) to replace and build on the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System and the increased visibility and reporting on results provided by Umoja, UNCTAD was expected to adapt the results-based management framework.

19. The recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 2
Improve the typology of UNCTAD research and analysis products for enhanced strategic decision-making

20. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

> UNCTAD should revisit its current typology of research and analysis products, ensuring that they reflect largely discrete product lines with key shared features. UNCTAD should use this typology to inform all major strategic decisions, from planning and budgeting to programme implementation and monitoring and evaluation (in accordance with recommendations 1 and 3–7).
>
> Indicator of achievement: Revised research and analysis product typology, used to inform major strategic decisions.

21. The recommendation addressed the lack of coherence in the classification of UNCTAD products and how that gap hindered the potential for UNCTAD to make the most strategically sound decisions possible and to clearly communicate its research and analysis work and its potential value added.

22. UNCTAD revised its typology in September 2016, which was endorsed by the Publications Committee on 3 November 2016. A description of the revised typology indicated that its purpose was to:

- Inform major strategic decisions within UNCTAD with regard to its publications, from planning and budgeting to programme implementation and monitoring and evaluation
- Enhance visibility and facilitate access to and web-based searches of UNCTAD research and analysis publications for external audiences
- Facilitate greater efficiency in respect of the internal management of UNCTAD publications.

The 2018–2019 publications programme was classified according to the revised typology.

23. The new typology classified reports under six areas: (a) flagship reports; (b) strategic publications; (c policy briefs; (d) policy reviews (country- or sector-specific); (e) technical and statistical reports; and (f) research papers. Each area was further described using three broad content classification criteria: purpose, audience and significance to the UNCTAD mandate and the strategic communication objectives of the programme. In addition, the typology also identified processing characteristics associated with each product line, so as to further distinguish it from other product lines, for example, characteristics such as format content, frequency, translation into other languages, co-publishing potential, quality assurance, attribution/citation, distribution, launch and promotion planning, monitoring and evaluation, and gender mainstreaming. The typology also informed the development of a prototype publications page of the UNCTAD website. The Publications Committee working group started the process of tagging the more than 3,000 UNCTAD publications by topic, type of publication, and country focus (if any), in order to develop a more effective web-browsing tool, and a prototype was developed to reflect the new typology on the UNCTAD website. Current publications pages were slated to reflect this new format by the end of 2018.

24. Documents were also reclassified, as a result of which more electronic publications were disseminated. A total of 64 of the 201 publications (32 per cent) planned for 2018–2019 were identified for web-only dissemination and would not be translated, thus allowing the reallocation of resources to other publications with greater impact. Web-only publications constituted 13.7 per cent of UNCTAD publications in 2014–2015, and the number was expected to increase to 27.5 per cent in 2016–2017.

25. In addition, the Publications Committee signalled its intention to have one dynamic publications list, to be managed by the Document Management Section. The list was to be made available beginning in 2018–2019 and was intended to integrate and replace the various typologies used across the Organization, including at the United Nations Publications Board, the Programme Planning and Budget Division in New York and UNCTAD in Geneva.

26. In interviews, staff indicated that the new typology had led to a clearer hierarchy for the prioritization and processing of reports for each of the departments and had improved the timeliness of publication approvals, given that it streamlined processes for the internal management of various types of publications. They also reported that the typology had led to greater consistency in the classification of publications and clearer definitions of what was required for each publication. They added that the web

page, once improved, would allow website visitors to easily access the publications they required.

27. The recommendation has been implemented. However, UNCTAD should continue to make progress in finalizing a consolidated publication list and in aligning the new UNCTAD website with the typology developed.

Recommendation 3
Develop and implement quality assurance frameworks in all divisions

28. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

> To help to ensure consistent quality standards across the organization, UNCTAD should develop and implement separate quality assurance frameworks for its general (namely, publication-focused) research and analysis product line and its statistics product line, to be applied across all divisions.
>
> Indicator of achievement: Quality assurance frameworks produced, rolled out, used and monitored.

29. The recommendation addressed the need for UNCTAD to develop and implement quality assurance mechanisms, both for its research and analysis and statistics products, and to implement those mechanisms in all divisions. UNCTAD had a 2014 revised policy clearance process, which consolidated quality assurance best practices accumulated over time. However, it did not possess any corporate documents that outlined its quality assurance methodology or defined what quality assurance entailed as specifically applied to UNCTAD publications and statistical databases. Furthermore, peer reviews of research and analysis products and open public access for statistical databases had not been consistently applied across the organization.

Research and analysis products [[H3]]

30. UNCTAD revised and updated its 2014 policy clearance process. The 2017 revision incorporated elements and recommendations proposed at a policy clearance retreat in October 2016. Divisional representatives and the Publications Committee working group also provided input to the revised policy. In interviews, staff indicated that, as a result of the consultative process, directors had taken ownership of and were accountable for implementing the policy clearance process and the overall quality assurance framework for their respective research and analysis products.

31. The 2017 revised policy clearance process included definitions of accuracy, credibility, applicability, relevance, coherence and timeliness, as well as key guiding rules for policy clearance. Assigned responsibilities were also identified, including which publications required clearance from the Office of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD rather than from division directors. It also established institutional criteria for policy clearance and guiding rules for the clearance of documents and publications. It indicated the processes that were mandatory and those that were "good practice" in the areas of policy clearance, peer review, consultations with member States and other key stakeholders, and formal editing for each document within the typology. An in-house peer review was also made mandatory for all flagship reports and policy briefs.[3]

[3] Policy briefs are circulated for comments for three days and the division concerned is responsible for taking them into consideration.

32. In addition, UNCTAD was finalizing a draft of the 2017 peer review guidelines. The draft guidelines outlined the objectives, procedures, application and responsibilities associated with the peer review process so as to ensure uniformity across all divisions. UNCTAD was also planning to improve the external peer review process in order to involve policymakers at the national level more systematically. A guide on the preparation of policy briefs was produced, highlighting the need for a quick clearance process and articulating the clearance procedures for documents that had previously been policy-cleared at the level of the Office of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and hence did not need to be policy-cleared a second time.

33. In interviews, staff indicated that the new processes had contributed to improved and better-articulated clearance procedures as well as stronger coordination among the divisions. They reported that staff were more focused on producing documents that were more policy-oriented and more closely aligned with the UNCTAD mandate. The revised processes were reflected in the *Economic Development in Africa Report 2017: Tourism for transformative and inclusive growth* (chapter 6, on policy recommendations), *The Least Developed Countries Report 2017: Transformational energy access* and the *Trade and Development Report 2017: Beyond austerity: Towards a global new deal*, all of which included policy recommendations. However, despite extensive dissemination of the revised policy clearance guidelines by the Office of the Secretary-General, staff indicated that not everyone was aware of them. UNCTAD should therefore consider further work to ensure consistent awareness and application of the guidelines.

34. This aspect of the recommendation has been implemented. UNCTAD should, however, finalize the peer review process and ensure that all staff are aware of the revised policy clearance guidelines.

Statistics products

35. UNCTAD did not have a quality assurance mechanism for statistics that would provide oversight and monitor and enforce statistical quality standards and adjudicate on statistical issues. At the time of the OIOS evaluation, an UNCTAD statistics quality assurance framework was being developed. However, UNCTAD was waiting for the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System to finalize its own quality assurance mechanism, the United Nations Statistics Quality Assurance Framework, before finalizing the UNCTAD framework. The draft United Nations Statistics Quality Assurance Framework developed in September 2016 had been circulated among the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System for comment and was due to be finalized and implemented in early 2018. In the Framework, it is stated, however, that a one-size statistical quality assurance framework that fit all agencies was not realistic and that a generic framework that should be adapted to the specific circumstances of each individual agency was therefore being developed.

36. Staff indicated that the Organization's consideration of adopting open data standards, making all data open-source, would have profound implications for divisions that would subsequently have to share their datasets. UNCTAD was planning to create an UNCTAD statistics coordination committee under the authority of the Deputy Secretary-General. The committee's remit would be to implement the United Nations Statistics Quality Assurance Framework. This aspect of the recommendation was still in progress and would be considered implemented once the Framework was adapted and applied to UNCTAD and all compilers of statistics

within UNCTAD adhered to those standards. The new coordination committee should include all senior managers to signal that this was an institutional priority.

37. The recommendation has been partially implemented, given that the quality assurance frameworks for general research and analysis products were developed but, despite progress with regard to statistics products, statistics quality assurance frameworks have not yet been developed. Once the United Nations Statistics Quality Assurance Framework is approved as expected in March 2018, UNCTAD must adapt the Framework to its own institutional environment without delay in order for this aspect of recommendation 3 to be considered implemented. The lack of statistical oversight and quality assurance resulted in a discrepancy in data whereby erroneously interpreted data were included in the July 2016 UNCTAD report "Trade Misinvoicing in Primary Commodities in Developing Countries: The cases of Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia". A representative of one of the countries listed in the report brought the error to the attention of the United Nations Statistics Division, whereupon the Division wrote to UNCTAD emphasizing that, in order to avoid similar and potentially damaging situations in the future, a quality assurance mechanism was urgently needed.[4]

Recommendation 4
Strengthen the Publications Committee for a more strategic, institution-wide approach to work planning

38. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

> To support a more strategic, institution-wide approach to work planning on research and analysis, UNCTAD should reinvigorate the Publications Committee and strengthen its remit. The Committee should undertake a collaborative, interdivisional discussion leading to evidence-based streamlining of the research and analysis workplan by jointly identifying, at a minimum:
>
> - Those products that are most relevant to current and trending knowledge needs in the areas within its mandate
> - Those products that are most conducive to making a difference in achieving the objectives of UNCTAD
> - What monitoring and evaluation efforts would be most appropriate given a product's risk profile (see recommendation 7)
> - Through which format and dissemination strategies each product line will most likely achieve its objectives (see recommendation 5)
> - Those research and analysis products of lower relevance to the strategic priorities of UNCTAD, or of lower quality in relation to their cost, that should be reshaped, differently resourced or reconsidered as an institutional priority.
>
> Indicator of achievement: Publications Committee meeting regularly and making concrete recommendations to the Secretary-General of UNCTAD on which products to continue or discontinue based on a critical review of all

[4] In a letter dated 23 August 2016 to UNCTAD, the United Nations Statistics Division stated "the trade data as presented in the UNCTAD publication are erroneously interpreted" and concluded "We would also like to explore with you how quality assurance procedures could be put in place to avoid future misinterpretations of this kind."

products along criteria indicated in the recommendation and any other criteria it might wish to use.

39. The recommendation addressed the need for improved work planning in order to determine which research and analysis topics to pursue, given that such planning had previously been identified predominantly within each division and there had been low interdivisional collaboration. Furthermore, a plethora of research and analysis products were being generated using internalized resources, with a high degree of variance in the value-for-money of such products.

40. The Publications Committee approved its revised terms of reference on 15 December 2016 and subsequently operated based on the functions enumerated therein. The terms of reference, which will be presented for consideration and approval by the Trade and Development Board at its sixty-fifth session, in 2018, require the Publications Committee to provide more strategic, institution-wide direction for UNCTAD research and analysis. Its functions are to include:

- Discussing and deciding upon policy aspects of all issues relating to the publications policy
- Monitoring the implementation of the publications policy, including the procedural improvements established as a result of the implementation of the OIOS recommendations
- Approving the publications programme
- Monitoring the implementation of the publications programme
- Discussing and advising the Secretary-General of UNCTAD on the topics for flagship and strategic publications
- Fostering a collaborative, interdivisional discussion on strategic research priorities, including research needs, products or themes
- Upstream planning of publications.

At its meeting, the Publications Committee made a proposal to institutionalize a Publications Committee working group for preparatory, interdivisional work to support the Committee and facilitate its strategic decision-making.

41. From September 2016 to October 2017, the Publications Committee and the working group met 10 and 22 times, respectively. Committee meetings were generally chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and attended by 7 to 10 divisional representatives. The meetings were focused on the implementation status of OIOS evaluation recommendations, including the interdivisional framework for various new measures being rolled out in response to the evaluation, the digitalization of flagship reports and the requirement to have a clear theoretical niche so as to avoid duplicating messages; reviewing potential topics for the 2018 flagship reports and opportunities for linkages and overlaps across identified divisions; interdivisional publications (for example, working together across UNCTAD on one or more flagship reports); and linkages between the Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes and the Technical Cooperation Division.

42. While UNCTAD is unable to substantially alter its publications programme for 2018–2019 given that the programme was approved by the Publications Board in 2016, the streamlining of the research and analysis workplan is a priority for the 2020 programme budget. To further streamline the workplan, UNCTAD developed

additional initiatives to promote interdivisional collaboration, cross-fertilization and potential joint research, as follows:

(a) The UNCTAD Research Seminar Series was introduced in March 2017 to promote extensive discussion among researchers and strengthen interdivisional work and cooperation within UNCTAD itself. It has also provided a platform for staff to present their work, receive feedback from colleagues and gain exposure to research. Nine series have been held, with the first series having been conducted on gender and economics;

(b) The "Crossing the Line Initiative: Research in Motion" was introduced. The Initiative was aimed at encouraging UNCTAD researchers to cross the invisible line between divisions, thus fostering an open exchange of ideas and data within the UNCTAD secretariat. Five themes were identified as opportunities for interdivisional exchange and cooperation, with tentative dates assigned to each. The first event was held on 1 February 2018;

(c) The Publications Committee and the working group recommended that a series of bilateral meetings take place with UNCTAD divisions. The meetings were organized by the Office of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the Intergovernmental Support Service and implemented in the last quarter of 2017. They were intended to generate evidence-based data to ensure the streamlining of research and analysis products in planning the 2020 publications programme; continuously monitor the implementation of the 2018–2019 publications programme; cull feedback to inform decisions on which publications to continue and discontinue; strengthen the focus on quality rather than quantity in the delivery of the publications programme; and improve coordination in the UNCTAD secretariat.

43. The revised typology, the Communications, Information and Outreach Monthly Monitor reports and the monitoring and reporting on the monitoring and evaluation framework indicators (see recommendation 7) contributed to the streamlining process for the 2020–2021 publications work programme. These processes provided baseline evidence to inform decisions on which publications were no longer necessary. Although the latter was not formally under way, there was a downward trend in the number of publications from 226 in 2014–2015, to 211 in 2016–2017 and 201 in 2018–2019 (planned).

44. Significant progress was made with regard to interdivisional coordination, namely through the strengthened Publications Committee and its adoption and use of the revised terms of reference and through the generation of evidence in order to begin streamlining UNCTAD research and analysis products. It is critical that this momentum continue, resulting in the streamlining for the 2020–2021 publications programme as planned, and that the revised terms of reference for the Publications Committee be presented for consideration and approval by the Trade and Development Board at its sixty-fifth session, in 2018. The recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 5
Strengthen the dissemination of research and analysis products

45. Recommendation 5 reads as follows:

> In order to achieve maximum results through its research and analysis products, UNCTAD should strengthen its emphasis on the dissemination of these products.

Indicator of achievement: Dissemination strategies are more clearly articulated, resourced and well-executed, resulting in more strategically targeted dissemination.

46. The recommendation addressed the limited degree of targeted outreach to maximize the potential uptake of UNCTAD research and analysis products and their impact on awareness and knowledge, with the limited amount of outreach resources available. UNCTAD did not have a stand-alone dissemination strategy in place.

47. UNCTAD developed a communications, information and outreach dissemination strategy that focused on virtual dissemination of the organization's research and analysis products. The strategy resulted in an increase in web-only publications as follows:

- 2014–2015: 13.7 per cent
- 2016–2017: 27.5 per cent
- 2018–2019: 32.0 per cent (planned).

Online formats to present and disseminate flagship reports were also used, such as a social media kit for *The Least Developed Countries Report 2017: Transformational energy access*, with examples of how the #UNLDC2017 hashtag was employed on the @UNCTAD Twitter feed.

48. In addition, minimum requirements for dissemination were developed, which outlined the mandatory and recommended practices for disseminating each of the six types of publications enumerated in paragraph 22 above. Other innovative dissemination practices were introduced. These included the following measures:

(a) The Communications, Information and Outreach Section was working with divisions so that they would be more strategic about launches, that such launches would be undertaken in multiple locations and a press corps would be present, and that the divisions would link with partners interested in the report;

(b) Reduction of the number of press releases from 98 in 2016 to 43 in 2017;

(c) Refinement of press releases to focus on key newsworthy messages, with the number of media mentions rising in tandem, namely from 10,830 in 2015 to 12,631 in 2016 and a projected 14,615 in 2017;

(d) Use of UNCTAD Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube accounts as dissemination avenues: Facebook Live was also used to launch the *World Investment Report 2016: Investor nationality: Policy challenges*, and Adobe Connect and WebEx were used to launch it online in 2017. A new Social Media Officer, expected to be onboarded in February 2018, was to focus further on the UNCTAD social media strategy;

(e) Tracking the impact of reports: Tracking data were shared for the *Information Economy Report 2017: Digitalization, trade and development*, which showed the number of media mentions of the report from 2013, 2015 and 2017, the number of downloads of the report compared with 2015 and the number of unique visitors viewing the story since 2015;

(f) Creation of short thematic videos to enhance the release of publications, such as the chapter on robotics in the *Trade and Development Report 2017: Beyond austerity: Towards a global new deal*, building on the momentum of the robotics policy brief, which was the fourth most-downloaded UNCTAD publication between September 2016 and September 2017.

49. In interviews, staff indicated that translation into all six official United Nations languages remained a challenge owing to the late submission by divisions of source-language documents. Translation times for the 2016 flagship and annual reports into French ranged from two months to more than one year. Staff stated that the variability in translation times was an indication that the volume of publications remained significant. In addition, an end-of-year publication glut continued to pose problems for dissemination. Interviewees maintained that disseminating too many publications at once heightened the risk that the impact of the individual communications would be devalued or that communications opportunities would be missed entirely. For 2017, close to half of UNCTAD publications (46 per cent) were delivered in the last two months of the biennium. Furthermore, there was a surplus of leftover physical copies of publications owing to their late finalization and clearance. The publication production process was therefore in need of reassessment. The Communications, Information and Outreach Section was thus considering reducing orders for physical copies.

50. The recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 6
Increase gender mainstreaming in research and analysis products

51. Recommendation 6 reads as follows:

> UNCTAD should reinforce gender mainstreaming in its research and analysis products, namely by:
>
> - Aiming to increase the number of its publications that meaningfully adopt a gender perspective
> - Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative gender markers, to the extent possible, into all stages of its quality assurance mechanism, from design to peer review
> - Including gender in all divisional workplans and appointing divisional gender focal points with clear roles and responsibilities.
>
> Indicator of achievement: Number of publications meaningfully incorporating a gender perspective increases annually; gender markers incorporated into quality assurance mechanism and divisional workplans; and divisional focal points identified.

52. The recommendation addressed the need for UNCTAD to mainstream gender in its research and analysis products, given that gender had been poorly integrated into this pillar at the time of the evaluation. There were no gender focal points within each division, nor had gender systematically been included in all divisional workplans.

53. In a memo to all directors and heads of service dated 30 October 2015, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD outlined four concrete pledges on gender equality and the economic empowerment of women within the framework of the International Gender Champions Initiative. The pledges were to make efforts to have at least one woman in all panels, round tables or sessions that UNCTAD organized in Geneva, including at the fourteenth session of UNCTAD; mainstream gender in all of UNCTAD flagship publications; review, with the help of the network of gender focal points of UNCTAD, all UNCTAD technical assistance programmes and mainstream gender in them; and foster gender equality in UNCTAD recruitment and promotions

54. A strategy for gender mainstreaming in UNCTAD research and analysis (2017–2018) was developed in December 2016. The strategy articulated two primary means of achieving gender mainstreaming, namely through:

- Integration of the gender focal points network into the production process of key UNCTAD publications (flagship reports, strategic publications and policy reviews)
- Staff empowerment.

The appointment of gender focal points, whose roles and responsibilities were to support the mainstreaming of gender in flagship reports, was also articulated in the strategy. Divisions were required to involve their respective divisional gender focal points at two stages of the production process, namely, in the preparation of the publication outline and in the peer review of the draft.[5] All gender focal points were appointed and they confirmed that this involvement had occurred.

55. In interviews, staff pointed to the limited skills set and expertise within UNCTAD to address gender issues and indicated that the implementation of gender mainstreaming relied on the present directors who had experience in that area and in-house gender experts, such that when staff changed, so too would the emphasis on gender. In June 2017, staff also identified a need to appoint alternate gender focal points for each division.

56. To enhance gender expertise, the UNCTAD Trade, Gender and Development Programme and the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization organized training on gender mainstreaming in research and analysis and in technical cooperation projects for 25 staff members, held in January and February 2017. A training session on the role of gender in economics was held for senior managers in March 2017.

57. In order to assess the extent to which gender had been incorporated into flagship reports since the time of the OIOS evaluation, the Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS conducted an analysis of a random sample of 15 UNCTAD flagship reports from 2015 to 2017. It rated the level of gender inclusion from one to three, with three being the highest level. The analysis indicated that in 9 of the 15 flagship reports sampled, gender had been incorporated into the report. The analysis is summarized in the table below.

Sample analysis of the inclusion of gender in flagship reports, 2015–2017

	Title of report	*Score*
2015	*Information Economy Report 2015: Unlocking the potential of e-commerce for developing countries*	1
	Technology and Innovation Report 2015: Fostering innovation policies for industrial development	1
	Commodities and Development Report 2015: Smallholder farmers and sustainable commodity development	2

[5] The network of gender focal points created terms of reference for its work in June 2015, which outlined the role and minimum staff level of the focal points, the necessary qualifications, the requisite time and resources to successfully meet expectations, and eight specific tasks and duties. However, the terms of reference never entered into effect.

	Title of report	*Score*
2016	*Trade Development Report, 2016: Structural transformation for inclusive and sustained growth*	3
	World Investment Report 2016: Investor nationality: Policy changes	1
	The Least Developed Countries Report 2016: The path to graduation and beyond: Making the most of the process	3
	Economic Development in Africa Report 2016: Debt dynamics and development finance in Africa	1
	Review of Maritime Transport 2016	1
2017	*Trade and Development Report 2017: Beyond austerity: Towards a global new deal*	3
	World Investment Report 2017: Investment and the digital economy	2
	The Least Developed Countries Report 2017: Transformational energy access	3
	Economic Development in Africa 2017 Report: Tourism for transformative and inclusive growth	3
	Review of Maritime Transport 2017	3
	Information Economy Report 2017: Digitalization, trade and development	3
	Commodities and Development Report 2017: Commodity markets, economic growth and development	1

Scoring:
3 — High level of gender inclusion throughout publication.[6]
2 — Moderate level of gender inclusion throughout publication.[7]
1 — Low level of gender inclusion throughout publication.[8]

[6] High-score criteria:
The publication had at least two of the below (some publications may not have a chapter devoted to gender)
- Chapter devoted to gender
- Gender is mentioned throughout the document, with a gender-differentiated approach to analysis
- Recommendations are broken down with a gender lens (issues that have a different impact on women and girls)
- Gender-disaggregated data.

[7] Moderate-score criteria:
- Some reference to gender, but not fully mainstreamed throughout
- Some analysis of gender differences
- Gender-disaggregated data.

[8] Low-score criteria:
- Very little to no mention of gender in the report.

58. The aforementioned gender strategy indicated the need for gender markers. However, that action was not implemented; in interviews, staff indicated that such markers would not make a significant difference in the mainstreaming of gender and were more of a bureaucratic tool that would not lead to change.

59. Although gender mainstreaming was reinforced by the development of the gender mainstreaming strategy, the recommendation has been partially implemented, owing to the outstanding items requiring further action. Gender needed to be more fully integrated into UNCTAD flagship reports, given that they had very few to no mentions of gender, women or girls. Furthermore, gender focal points needed to be institutionalized in UNCTAD and alternates assigned to each division.

60. The recommendation has been partially implemented.

Recommendation 7
Strengthen results-focused monitoring and evaluation of research and analysis work

61. Recommendation 7 reads as follows:

> UNCTAD should dedicate focused attention and resources to the monitoring and evaluation of its research and analysis results. In keeping with United Nations Evaluation Group normative guidance, this would entail:
>
> - Creation of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the organization
> - Development of a risk-based evaluation plan, identifying which research and analysis products require individualized evaluation and which might be adequately covered by a product line-based approach, and accompanied by a resource mobilization plan for ensuring adequate evaluation coverage of the pillar.
>
> Indicator of achievement: Monitoring and evaluation framework produced, followed by production of risk-based evaluation plan, with both indicating how United Nations Evaluation Group guidance has been incorporated

62. The recommendation addressed the need for UNCTAD to strengthen monitoring and evaluation coverage of its research and analysis products. Internal monitoring and evaluation coverage had not been standardized or based on an institutional assessment of monitoring and evaluation needs; rather, it was undertaken based on the priorities set by each division.

63. Following a revision of its 2011 evaluation policy, UNCTAD developed the evaluation policy 2018–2020. The latter was awaiting UNCTAD clearance and governing body approval at the time of the triennial review. The policy explained key concepts, established guiding principles, outlined evaluation roles and responsibilities within the UNCTAD institutional framework and delineated the evaluation processes as well as the mechanisms for implementing the evaluation policy and guiding principles from the 2016 revised norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group. In addition, the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit developed self-evaluation guidelines for project managers. The guidelines were to be launched in January 2018 and included methodological approaches; roles and responsibilities; human rights-based approaches to and gender mainstreaming in evaluation; guidelines for planning a participatory self-evaluation; and templates.

64. UNCTAD developed a risk-based evaluation plan, which was approved in December 2016. The plan's risk-based approach informed the evaluation workplan

and resource mobilization strategy of the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, which subsequently followed a more dynamic process for identifying evaluation topics. In interviews, staff indicated that the risk-based plan was a useful exercise that helped to determine how risks should be addressed and to focus the yearly evaluations on UNCTAD priorities.

65. The Evaluation and Monitoring Unit focused on the research and analysis pillar for its 2016–2017 evaluation plan. That focus was emphasized in the terms of reference for the evaluation of subprogramme 5 on Africa, least developed countries and special programmes. The Unit also completed a meta-evaluation, to be finalized by early 2018. The meta-evaluation examined the results and completion of all evaluations undertaken within UNCTAD, in order to identify trends and linkages across the divisions, and used the results of that evaluation to inform programme design where there were trends in linkages with the outcomes. A separate category was included in the meta-evaluation for research and analysis of UNCTAD work.

66. In November 2016, the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, the working group of the Publications Committee and the results-based management focal points harmonized the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System research indicators. That process resulted in two output-level indicators, four reaction-focused outcome-level indicators, two learning-focused outcome-level indicators and two application-focused outcome-level indicators, all of which UNCTAD classified as either "mandatory" or "good practice" under the minimum standards for monitoring and evaluation. The latter were also revised in mid-2017, and UNCTAD was planning to update the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System indicators to reflect the changes.

67. Although minor outstanding actions remain, namely, the clearance and approval of the UNCTAD evaluation policy 2018–2020, the launch of the self-evaluation guidelines of the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit and the update of the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System indicators, in view of the considerable progress made, the recommendation has been implemented.

III. Conclusion

68. Through the implementation of five of the seven OIOS evaluation recommendations, coupled with partial implementation of the remaining two recommendations, UNCTAD took significant action to strengthen its research and analysis pillar. Together, those actions demonstrated greater commitment to the principles of results-based management, including the importance of sound strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and quality assurance. It likewise made gains in strengthening the Publications Committee, improving the dissemination of its publications and fostering greater interdivisional collaboration. The various actions appeared to be producing early positive results. However, further steps to improve gender mainstreaming and statistical quality assurance and to submit the revised terms of reference of the Publications Committee for consideration and eventual approval by the Trade and Development Board remain outstanding.

(*Signed*) Heidi **Mendoza**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
15 March 2018

Annex

Comments from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

The full text of the comments received from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its fifty-fifth session on the programme evaluation of UNCTAD is provided below. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

The Secretary-General of UNCTAD and his senior management team would like to express their appreciation to the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for the efforts in undertaking the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations from the programme evaluation of UNCTAD (E/AC.51/2015/4).

The Secretary-General of UNCTAD acknowledges that the evaluation has been instrumental in the ongoing efforts to enhance the work of the UNCTAD secretariat in its research and analysis pillar.

UNCTAD acknowledges the conclusion of the triennial review indicating that five recommendations (recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7) were implemented and two (recommendations 3 and 6) were partially implemented.

Against this background, the Secretary-General wishes to make the following comments:

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement quality assurance frameworks in all divisions

This recommendation was partially implemented, as the quality frameworks for general research and analysis products were developed but, despite progress with regard to statistical products, these have not yet been developed. In this regard, the secretariat wishes to note that the UNCTAD statistical quality framework is currently being developed, but can be finalized only once Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System completes its own quality assurance mechanism, the United Nations Statistics Quality Assurance Framework. The United Nations Statistics Quality Assurance Framework is expected to be approved in March 2018, and UNCTAD will immediately adapt this framework to its own institutional environment in order for this aspect of recommendation 3 to be considered fully implemented.

Recommendation 6: Increase gender mainstreaming in research and analysis products

UNCTAD is committed to implementing the strategy for gender mainstreaming in UNCTAD research and analysis (2017–2018) as developed in December 2016. As per the OIOS sample analysis of the inclusion of gender in flagship reports between 2015 and 2017 (see table), increasing numbers of flagship reports demonstrated a "high level of gender inclusion throughout the publication". UNCTAD will continue to prioritize the integration of gender in UNCTAD flagship reports. In addition, gender focal points will further be institutionalized in UNCTAD and alternate gender focal points assigned to each division.